

The Small Wars Academy Filling the Educational Gap

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The Small Wars Academy  
*Filling the Educational Gap*  
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to  
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When the march to Baghdad was completed in early April of 2003, Iraqi television broadcasts showed a statue of Saddam Hussein torn from its concrete base. Iraqis, searching for answers about their future, began to overwhelm the Marines who pulled the statue down. When would the power be restored? Where should they go for medical care? Who was in charge?<sup>1</sup> Though it was difficult to see at the time, the Marines' role had begun to change. They had started a shift from conventional combat operations to something different. They had begun to fight a small war. Small wars are defined as "... operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation."<sup>2</sup> Over the past three years much has been done to ensure that Marines deploying to Iraq receive the best training possible to prepare them for the challenges that a small war presents. The positive steps that have been taken to improve training for Marines must

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<sup>1</sup> Maj Martin F. Wetterauer (Operations Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines / OIF I), conversation with author, March 15, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Navy, *Small Wars Manual*, 1940 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1990), 1.

be paralleled by improvement of the educational system of Marine officers. In order to achieve this goal, a "Small Wars Academy" must be created to *build* and *sustain* a knowledge base in officers that will enable them to fight the small wars of the future effectively.

**The Educational Goal:**

In a speech delivered in early 2005, General Anthony Zinni (Ret) stated that to excel on the modern battlefield leaders must become "Renaissance Men". The determination of educational building blocks for this "Renaissance Man" has already been done. The *Small Wars Manual*, coupled with after action comments provided by units returning from Iraq, gives insight into subjects that must be understood by leaders in a small war. The graphic below depicts these educational building blocks.



While some of these elements are now taught in formal schools throughout the Marine Corps, no school has been given the formal task of conducting small wars education.

### **Small Wars Education: Current Status**

The chart below depicts the mission of each the Marine Corps' formal schools that are required for officer career progression. Although small wars education is not specifically mentioned in any of these mission statements, each of the schools has made an effort to incorporate some element of small wars education into their curriculum.

| Small Wars Education<br>Training and Education Command |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| School   | Mission  | Small Wars Education   |
| <b>The Basic School</b><br>(TBS)                       | "Train and educate newly commissioned or appointed officers in the high standards of professional knowledge, spirit-de-corps, and leadership required to prepare them for duty as company grade officers in the operating forces, with particular emphasis on the duties, responsibilities and warfighting skills required of a rifle platoon commander." <sup>3</sup>   | <i>Small Wars education is limited at The Basic School. There is a small block of "Cultural Awareness" instruction that has been inserted into the Program of Instruction (POI).</i>   |
| <b>Expeditionary Warfare School</b><br>(EWS)           | "Provide Marine Captains career-level professional military education and oversees their professional military training in command and control, MAGTF operations ashore, and naval expeditionary operations in order to enable them to command or serve as a primary staff officer in their MOS, integrate their capabilities resident within their element of the MAGTF, and understand the functioning of the other elements of the MAGTF." <sup>4</sup> | <i>A "Current Operations" curriculum has been developed and is being implemented for the first time this year. The purpose of this curriculum is to "prepare the students to fight in the current operating environment as part of a MAGTF"<sup>5</sup></i>  |
| <b>Command &amp; Staff College</b><br>(CSC)            | "Informed by the study of history, language and culture, CSC educates and trains its joint, multinational, and interagency professionals in order to produce skilled warfighting leaders able to overcome diverse 21 <sup>st</sup> Century security challenges." <sup>6</sup>  | <i>"The courses of recent past academic years spanned the Theory and Nature of War, Strategy and Policy, the Operational Level of War, Warfighting from the Sea, Military Operations Other than War, and the Art of Command. Much of this timeless course content is carried into the new curriculum, but with a shift in focus towards greater relevancy in light of today's current operations in the Middle East and around the globe."<sup>7</sup></i> |
| <b>The Marine Corps War College</b><br>(MCWAR)         | "Educate selected senior officers and civilians for decision-making during war and military operations other than war in a joint, interagency, and multinational environment..." <sup>8</sup>  | <i>The War, Policy and Strategy portion of the Marine Corps War College curriculum includes detailed analysis of several wars that could be considered as small wars. There is, however, "no stated focus on Small Wars within the curriculum."<sup>9</sup></i>  |

The most significant curriculum modifications within our formal schools over the past two years have been made

<sup>3</sup> The Basic School Homepage, <http://www.tbs.usmc.mil/>

<sup>4</sup> The Expeditionary Warfare School Homepage, <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/ews/>

<sup>5</sup> Expeditionary Warfare School, "Current Operations Package" Command Brief (2006)

<sup>6</sup> The Command and Staff College Homepage, <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/csc.htm>

<sup>7</sup> The Command and Staff College Curriculum Page, <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/csc/CURRICULLUM.htm>

<sup>8</sup> The Marine Corps War College Homepage, <http://www.usmc.mil/MCWAR/default.ctm>

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Joseph L. Strange, Professor, MCWAR, interview with the author, December 15, 2005.

at the Expeditionary Warfare School and Command and Staff College. In each case the school attempted to balance its stated mission with a responsibility to provide education specifically focused on "current operations". These "current operations" packages include some elements of the small wars education model shown above. In essence, the schools are attempting to provide conventional and small wars education simultaneously. This is being done in the same amount of time as was used to prepare the students for conventional wars in the past.

In order to increase focus on current operations, Command and Staff College modified portions of the original Program of Instruction (POI), which resulted in decreased focus on conventional operations.<sup>10</sup> Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS) simply added the instruction to the existing POI, which has resulted in students being forced to choose between two areas of focus.<sup>11</sup> In each case, the school accepted decreased student proficiency in conventional operations in order to achieve limited proficiency in small wars. While this change in curriculum has been an effective short-term solution to the small wars educational

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. Wray Johnson, Instructor, Command and Staff College, interview with author, December 14, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Major Kyle B. Ellison, Instructor, Expeditionary Warfare School, interview with author, December 8, 2005.

deficiencies that formal schools faced in 2003, it is clearly not a solution to the problem.

### **Small Wars Education: Learning from the Past**

The small wars education that is being conducted at Marine Corps' formal schools is a direct result of the current operating environment. The Marine Corps has inserted this instruction into its educational structure, which is not designed to handle it, to meet the current threat. Little thought has been given to what will happen when the definition of "current operations" changes. Dr. Wray Johnson provides an interesting historical analysis of the American approach to Small Wars Doctrine and insight into the future of small wars education:

"U.S. military doctrine for limited conflict has followed a fairly predictable pattern: First: irregular warfare is declared to be a significant threat to U.S. interests. Shortly afterward, analysts demand a qualitatively different approach to the threat outside the mainstream of conventional warfare. A contest is engaged between "small wars" doctrine proponents and "big war" traditionalists. The former achieve some measure of success in altering doctrine and force structure, but invariably this progress is fleeting as traditionalists reassert the dominance of Clausewitzian principles of warfighting."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Wray Johnson, *Vietnam and American Doctrine for Small Wars* (Bangkok: Lotus Press, 2001), 181-182.



The military approach to small wars education has paralleled its approach to small wars doctrine. When the educational need arises, schools are created and POI's are revised. The schools are closed and the focus on conventional operations is renewed when the perceived threat of irregular warfare subsides.<sup>13</sup> If the pattern mentioned above repeats itself, the Marine Corps will lose the educational gains it has made over the past three years. This will occur because of the manner in which the educational problem was addressed. Because Small Wars education is introduced into existing schools when necessary, the survival of small wars education is tied to the direction of the school. The direction of the school is dictated by the current and projected future operating environments. When the operational environment changes, so does the curriculum of the school. Therefore, the core of the Marine Corps' small wars education can not rest within the existing formal schools. In order to ensure that small wars education is not manipulated by changes in the operational environment, a separate Small Wars Academy should be established.

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<sup>13</sup> 1996 Intelligence News Webpage, [http://www.fas.org/irp/news/1996/n19960626\\_960615.html](http://www.fas.org/irp/news/1996/n19960626_960615.html)

## **The Small Wars Academy: The Long Term Solution**

A Small Wars Academy should be designed with two goals in mind: (1) building a small wars knowledge base within the officer corps and, (2) sustaining this knowledge base indefinitely. If the school is designed correctly, it will increase officers' knowledge base and survive the cultural shift to conventional operations that will likely occur in the future.

The first step in designing the Small Wars Academy is to determine its mission. In making this determination, it is helpful to look to the Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron - One (MAWTS-1) mission statement. The MAWTS-1 mission is to:

...provide standardized training in all aspects of the employment of Marine aviation units towards the accomplishment of their assigned mission; and as directed, to provide assistance in the development of aviation weapons and tactics; and as directed, to provide for evaluation of other aviation units.<sup>14</sup>

The Small Wars Academy Mission should be:

Prepare selected officers and civilians for execution of foreign policy within the confines of a small war; and as directed, provide assistance in the development of small wars tactics and associated publications; and, as directed, provide educational support to operational units within the Fleet Marine Force.

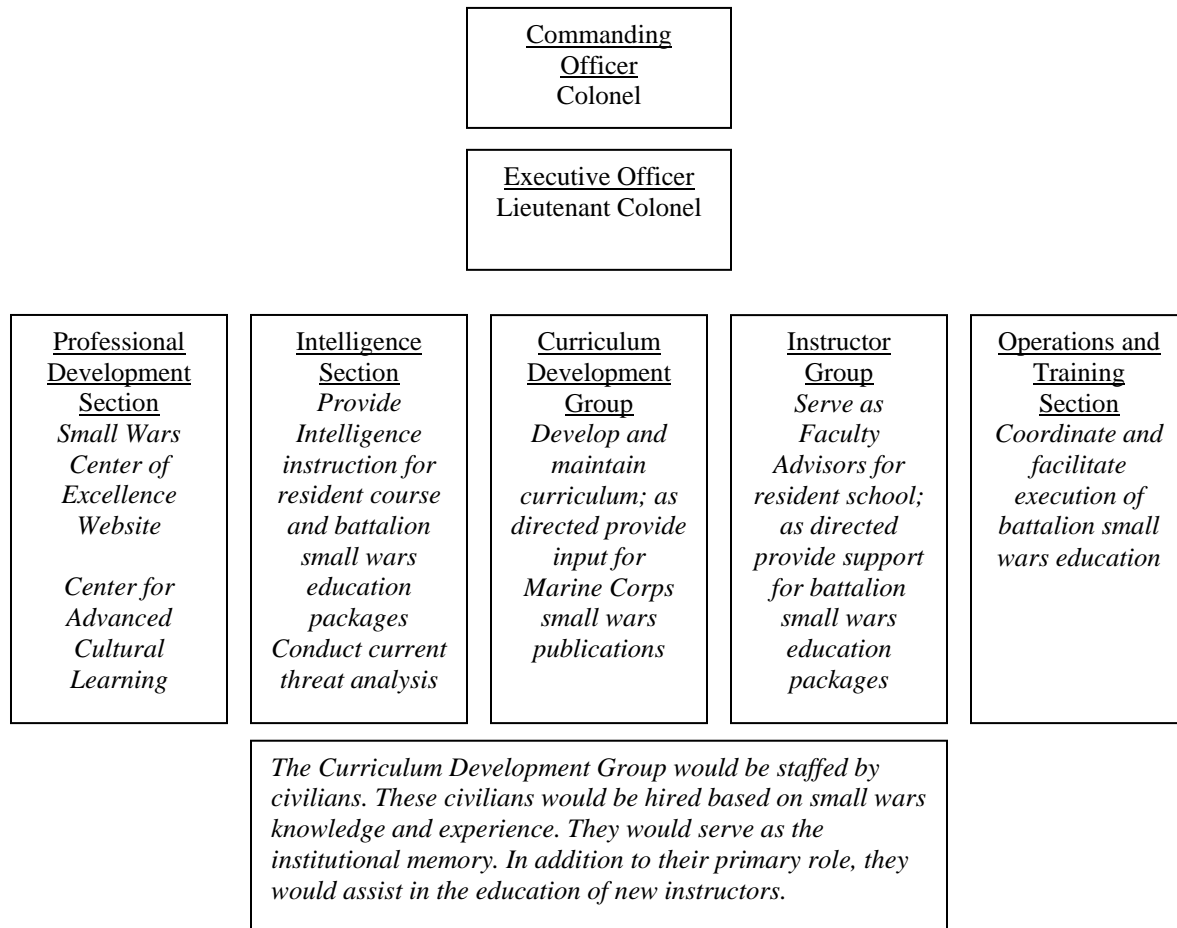
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<sup>14</sup> Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron - One Homepage, <https://restricted.mcu.usmc.mil/mawts1/>

Applying the MAWTS-1 model to the Small Wars Academy will provide several advantages. First, it will designate the academy as the source of small wars education in the Marine Corps and beyond. Next, it will task a designated cadre of professionals to refine and publish small wars tactics. It will also allow that cadre to form Mobile Training Teams (MTT) to facilitate battalion small wars education within the operating forces. The first key to sustaining this institution is also found within the mission statement. The school would be designed to educate officer's as well as civilians. The civilian population would come from agencies ranging from the Central Intelligence Agency to the Department of State. This would increase interagency support for the school while simultaneously educating our civilian counterparts on their role in a small war.

The next step in creating a Small Wars Academy will be to design the staff. One of the advantages of creating a Small Wars Academy would be the opportunity to build a staff that could focus completely on small wars education. With a few noteworthy exceptions, the instructors at our formal schools were not selected because of their small wars expertise. The staff of a Small Wars Academy, however, should be experts in small wars doctrine, training and

education. The diagram below provides a model of the Small Wars Academy should be structured:



\* This staff construct shifts the Small Wars Center of Excellence Website and the Center for Advanced Cultural Learning from their present location to the Small Wars Academy.

The next step to creating the Small Wars Academy would be to define its method of employment. The small wars education will be provided via three methods: (1) the resident school which would support two three-month courses a year of two-hundred students per class; (2) a distance education program similar to those currently being

conducted for EWS and CSC; and (3) unit training packages facilitated by MTT's and tailored by the commander to meet the specific educational requirements of his unit. These unit training packages would also serve as credit towards completion of the course via the distance education program.

The final step in the creation of a Small Wars Academy is to ensure its survival. The Small Wars Academy should be required Professional Military Education (PME) for all combat arms officers prior to promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. This requirement will place the Marine Corps, as an organization, behind the effort and is the only way to ensure that the school survives the inevitable shift of focus to conventional operations.

### **Exploiting the Opportunity**

By establishing a Small Wars Academy the Marine Corps has the opportunity to provide an effective solution to the small wars educational problem it currently faces. It has the opportunity to educate the "Renaissance Man" that General Zinni spoke of. In so doing, the Marine Corps would increase the small wars knowledge base of our officers and sustain that knowledge indefinitely. However, the Marine Corps must act quickly before the operational environment

shifts and the focus reverts to conventional operations.  
Once this happens, much of the support for a Small Wars  
Academy that could be garnered will be lost.

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## Bibliography

Department of the Navy, *Small Wars Manual*, 1940 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1990), 1.

Dr. Wray Johnson, *Vietnam and American Doctrine for Small Wars* (Bangkok: Lotus Press, 2001), 181-182.